OF THE NATURE OF SUPERSTITION.

A SERMON PREACHED At St Dunstans West,

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By *EDWARD STILLINGFLEET*, D. D. Dean of S. *Paul's*, and Chaplain in Ordinary to His MAJESTY.

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Coloss. 2. 23.

Which things have indeed a ſhew of wiſdom in will-worſhip, and humility, and neglecting of the body, not in any honour to the ſatisfying of the fleſh.

Saint *Paul* was now a Priſoner at *Rome* for the ſake of the Goſpel, when he wrote this Epiſtle to the *Coloſſians*, but his mind was at liberty; And the compaſs of his thoughts and cares was ſo far from being confined within the Walls of a Priſon, that it reached not only to the Churches of *Aſia* planted by himſelf, as thoſe of *Epheſus* and *Galatia*; but to thoſe which had never ſeen him, as the *Coloſſians* and *Laodiceans*. For, ſaith he, *I would that ye knew* Coloſſ. 2. 1. *what great conflict I have for you, and for them at Laodicea, and for as many as have not ſeen my face in*

the fleſh. Had not he trouble enough with the Churches of *Rome* and *Greece*, and thoſe he had converſed with in other parts, but he muſt take upon him to interpoſe in the affairs of thoſe Churches he had never ſeen? But ſuch was the largeneſs of the Apoſtle's mind, the fervour of his Zeal, the extent of his Charity, that *the care of all the Churches was upon him*; but eſpecially thoſe which had been planted by his means, although not by his perſonal endeavours; among which, in all probability, this of the *Coloſſians* was
Coloſſ. 1. 7. one. For this *Epaphras* whom St. *Paul* calls *a faithful Miniſter of Chriſt to them*, was imploy'd as an Evangeliſt under him; and particularly in the Cities of *Laodicea*, *Hierapolis*, and *Coloſſe*, which were not far diſtant from each other in *Phrygia*; and for the Churches there ſetled, S. *Paul* teſtifies, that he had a mighty zeal and concernment:
4. 13. From whence it aroſe, that hearing of S. *Pauls* Impriſonment at *Rome*, he reſolves to take a Journey thither to acquaint him with the State of thoſe Churches, and to deſire his Advice and Direction in the preſent danger they were in, of being ſeduced from the ſimplicity of the Goſpel, by the plauſible inſinuations of falſe Teachers, who pretended to give them a more refined Syſteme of Religion, by a compoſition of Law and Goſpel and Philoſophy all together. S. *Paul* underſtanding

ſtanding by him the dangerous circumſtances they were in, although *Epaphras* himſelf was made a *Fellow-Priſoner* with him; as appears by the *Epiſtle* to *Philemon*, ſent at the ſame time with this; yet Philem. 23. he finds means by *Tychicus* and *Oneſimus* to convey this Epiſtle to them. Wherein by an admirable art of inſinuation, far above the eloquent *exordiums* of the Heathen Orators, he lets them underſtand, how paſſionately he was concerned for their welfare; and what an *Agony* he ſuffered in his own breaſt for their ſakes, leſt under ſome artificial colours and very fair pretences, they ſhould be drawn off from the Love and Unity and Sincerity of the Goſpel. For after he had told them *what conflict he had for them that had not ſeen his face in the fleſh*, he immediately adds, that it was, *that their hearts might be comforted, being knit together* Coloſſ. 2. *in love, and unto all riches of the full aſſurance of under-* 2, 3. *ſtanding, to the acknowledgment of the Myſtery of God and of the Father and of Chriſt. In whom are hid all the treaſures of wiſdom and knowledge.* And when he hath thus ſet forth the excellency and ſufficiency of the Goſpel; he then lets fall an intimation of his deſign, *And this I ſay, leſt any man ſhould beguile* V. 4. *you with enticing words.* But leſt they ſhould ſuſpect from hence that ill offices had been done them, and they had been miſrepreſented to S. *Paul*; in the next verſe he tells them, that at that diſtance,

he

V. 5. *he did rejoice, beholding their order, and the ſtedfaſtneſs of their faith in Chriſt.* And therefore exhorts them,
V. 6. *As they had received Chriſt Jeſus the Lord, ſo to walk in him*: *i. e.* to adhere to that faith which they at firſt embraced; as he explains it, in the ſeventh Verſe. Having thus removed all jealouſy and ſuſpicion as to their preſent ſtedfaſtneſs, he doth more openly addreſs himſelf to them; in giving them caution againſt the moſt dangerous and de-
V. 8. ceitful errours. *Beware leſt any man ſpoil you through Philoſophy and vain deceit, after the Tradition of men, after the rudiments of the World, and not after Chriſt.* Not as though there were the leaſt prejudice to Chriſtianity to be imagined by mens ſearching into the Works of God, or the Nature of Moral Actions, or the digeſting our own thoughts or conceptions of things, which is all that is underſtood by true Philoſophy; but that the Model of Religion which they were in ſo much danger of being deceived by, was made up, partly of Philoſophical Precepts, and partly of Jewiſh Traditions and ritual Obſervations; by which the falſe Teachers endeavoured to corrupt and adulterate the Goſpel of Chriſt. Accordingly in the following Diſcourſe, the Apoſtle firſt diſputes againſt the neceſſity of keeping the Ceremonies of the Law, now under the Goſpel, and ſums up the force of it, v. 17. *Which are a ſhadow of things to come, but the*

the body is of Christ. And having thus dispatched the hardest Question about the Obligation of the Law of *Moses*, he enters upon the debate about other Inventions, which they endeavoured to recommend to Christians.

(1.) About the *Worshipping of Angels*, as *Mediators* between God and Men; which was an Opinion then generally received among the corrupters of Christianity, the *Gnosticks* and *Judaizing Christians*; who were not so vain in their imaginations, to believe them to be *supreme and independent Deities*; for this they utterly denied; owning *one only supreme God the Father of all*: but they thought access to him was to be had by the *Mediation* of *Angels*, and therefore they brought in the *Worship* of them. *Baronius* indeed denies, *that the Gnosticks introduced any Worship of Angels*; but therein he is justly confuted by some late Writers of the Roman Church. For *Tertullian* condemns *the Gnosticks* for *a Magical Service of Angels*; and *Epiphanius* saith, *that their impure Sacrifices were supposed to be offer'd up by Principalities and Powers, to the supreme Father of all.* Which doth evidently prove, that the *Gnosticks* did give Worship to Angels as *Mediators*. And although *Baronius* endeavours likewise to clear the *Cerinthians* from this guilt (lest the *Church* of *Rome* should be found to tread in their steps) *because* Cerinthus *acknowledged*

A. D. 60. *n.* 17. *Christian. Lup. in Tertul. de præscript. c.* 33. *Nat. Alex. Sæc.* 1. *p.* 52. *Tertull. de præscript. c.* 33. *Epiph. hær.* 21. *p.* 58.

Bar. ib. n. 20.

ledged one supreme Power above Angels, and because he had a bad Opinion of the Angel which gave the Law; yet, why might not they worship the *Angels* as *Mediators* between that supreme Power and them; and even that *Angel* which gave the Law as well as the rest, since they contended for the necessary observation of the Law? But besides, all the *Judaizing Christians* were not followers of *Cerinthus*, there being different *Sects* among them; as appears by *Irenæus*, *Epiphanius* and others; and *Baronius* himself grants *that the Pharisaical Jews of that and following Ages did Worship Angels as the Host of Heaven.* And the *Essens* had *their Angels of Prayer*; *and made their prayers to the rising Sun*, whom they looked on as on the rest of the Stars, as animated and intelligent Beings. And why the *Judaizing Christians* should not retain their former Superstitions, as well as their other Traditions and Observations, I do not understand. Especially, since *Theodoret* so expressly affirms, *that those who then pleaded for the keeping of the Law brought in the Worship of Angels, which custom*, he saith, *continued a long time in* Phrygia *and* Pisidia; *and at last the Council of* Laodicea, made a Canon against *praying to Angels.*

n. 16.

Those of the *Church* of *Rome* are so sensible of the force of this *Testimony* of *Theodoret* against their practice, that they are driven to desperate shifts to avoid it. *Bellarmine* saith, *that he speaks against*

Bell. de S. B. c. 20.

against the Gnosticks; whereas *Theodoret mentions only those who were for keeping the Law.* *Baronius* saith in plain terms, *Theodoret was mistaken, and that there were no such Hereticks then*; but this is so gross, that *Bellarmin* and others contradict him in it. Others therefore say, that the Worship of Angels here spoken against, *is the Worshipping of them as Makers of the World.* But that is more than St. *Paul* saith, for he speaks against that *Worship* which arises from *Humility*, and nothing so proper for that, as the *Worshipping* them as *Mediators* between God and us. Some think it is *when Angels are preferred before Christ*, which is likewise more than the Apostle saith; and they who chuse other *Mediators*, by whom God is more accessible by us, do prefer them in *Use*, though not in *Dignity*: Others, as the *Jansenists* in their *New Testament*, say it is, *When Angels are set up as Mediators in opposition to Christ*; but that cannot be the Apostles meaning; for then his great business would have been to have proved Christ to be the true *Mediator*, and not *Angels*; and if any *Religious Worship* of *Angels* had been agreeable with the Christian Doctrine, the Apostle would never have thus in general condemned it, but with such restrictions and limitations as made it to be evil. Therefore to avoid these difficulties, some conclude that *by the Worship of Angels* is understood *such a Worship*

Jansen. Preface Ep. Aux. Coloss.

as was introduced by a pretended Revelation of Angels; but against this, we have the concurrent testimony of St. *Chrysostome*, St. *Hierome*, St. *Ambrose*, *Oecumenius*, *Theophylact*, who all agree that it is to be understood of the *Worship given to Angels.* So impossible it is for those who either give themselves, or justifie and allow the giving by others, any *Religious Worship to Angels*, to escape falling under the Apostles censure, of being Seducers and corrupting the Gospel of Christ.

Chrys. in l. Hier. Algas. q. 10.

(2.) About *Stricter Abstinence and greater Severity of Life.* For these Seducers gave out that the *Christian Churches* were yet very defective in this matter: And that there were several Societies of Men, both among the *Jews* and *Heathens*, which went very far beyond them: as the *Essens*, the *Pythagoreans*, the *Gymnosophists* and others; who far outstript the Christians in *Watchings* and *Fastings*, in the hard usage of their Bodies, and a total *abstinence from Wine and Flesh*, and other lawful Pleasures of Life. On which account these false Teachers represented the Christianity, as yet received in these Churches, as too soft and gentle an Institution, and not answering the Character that was given of it; but if they had a mind to set it off with advantage, it would be necessary for them to take in some of the strictest Precepts of those Societies, especially relating to Meats and

and Marriage, *Touch not, taste not, handle not*: which they magnified as the greatest Instances of true Religion, Self-denyal, Humility, Mortification; without which they despised the Christian Institution as a mean and ordinary thing, requiring only the belief of some great things done and suffered by *Jesus Christ* in *Judea*, and the adhering thereto till Death, and doing those Offices of Humanity and Kindness to each other, and those Duties of Religion to *God*, which all Mankind thought fit and reasonable to be done.

But these pretended refiners of Christianity, were not contented with such common things; they must set up for something singular, and extraordinary; so *Epiphanius* observes of the *Gnosticks* in the beginning, *that they condemned Marriage, and abstained from Flesh, that under these pretences they might draw others into their snares.* And likewise of the *Ebionites*, one of the *Sects* of *Judaizing Christians, that they carefully abstained from all Flesh, and were every day Baptised, and celebrated the Eucharist only in Water, for fear of being defiled with the taste of Wine*; wherein they were followed by the *Encratitæ*, *Aquarij*, and several others, who affected something out of the way, as a badge of more than ordinary Sanctity. And there are scarce any of those who are mentioned as the Authors of great Mischief to the Church, but were

Epiph. Hær. 23. *p.* 63.

Hær. 30. *p.* 139.

remarkable for ſomething of this Nature; as appears by *Marcion*, *Montanus*, *Manichæus*, *Severus*, and others. And which is obſervable, this ſort of ſingularity prevailed no where more, than in theſe parts of *Phrygia*; where the *Encratitæ* very much encreaſed and continued ſo to do in the days of *Epiphanius*. So very little effect had this wiſe and timely caution, given by the Apoſtle in this place, upon thoſe who were willing to be deceived in that, or following Generations.

Epiph. hær. 47. *p.* 339.

Cajetan confeſſes himſelf to ſeek *what ſort of Men thoſe were the Apoſtle diſcourſes againſt*; but it ſeems moſt probable to me, that they were a ſort of *Judaizing Chriſtians*, who endeavoured to introduce the *Cuſtoms* of the *Jewiſh Eſſens* into the Chriſtian Church. For when St. *Paul* ſpeaks of the *Jewiſh Cuſtoms* he mentions no other, but ſuch as were in eſteem among them; he takes no notice of *Sacrifices* which were diſeſteemed among them; *But let no man judge you in Meat*, which among them was only *Bread and Salt*; or *in Drink*, which was only *Water*; or *in reſpect of a Holyday or New Moon*, or the *Sabbath Days*; which as *Philo* relates, *they were great obſervers of*. And when he ſpeaks of the *Cuſtoms* they would bring among the Chriſtians, they were no other than ſuch as were ſtrictly obſerved among them, *viz. great abſtinence, hard uſage of their Bodies, and ſome Religious*

Philo p. 876.

Epiph. p. 42.

V. 16.

Philo p. 877, 899.

gious Rites with respect to Angels. Concerning which the Apostle delivers his Judgment two ways.

1. He grants that these things have *a shew of Wisdom in them*; *i. e.* that they make so good an *appearance* to men, as is apt to raise an esteem of those persons in whom it is. First, Because they seem to flow from *a forwardness in Religion*, so I render Ἐθελοθρησκείᾳ, which we call *Will-worship*; but that being a thing of an ill Name, doth not so well answer to *the shew of Wisdom*; for what *shew of Wisdom* is there in doing an ill thing? This is therefore a readiness of Mind to do any thing in Religion which men think pleasing to God, whether required by him or not. So *Hesychius* expounds Ἐθελοθρησκείαν by Ἐθελοσέβειαν; and Ἐθελήμως by προθύμως. And other Greek Words of a like composition, do imply no more than *a voluntary inclination*; as in Ἐθελοδουλεία, which *Plato* useth for *a service out of good Will, and free Inclination*: Ἐθελόπονος is the same with φιλόπονος and φιλοκίνδυνος in *Xenophon*: And St. *Augustine* observes, that in his time, a Man that affected to be Rich, was called *Thelo-dives*, and he that desired to be thought Wise *Thelo-sapiens*; so according to this Analogy, a Man that would be thought very Religious, would then have been called *Thelo-Religiosus*; taking *Religiosus* in the sense of *Massurius Sabinus*, and

Plato Sym.

Xen. Cyr. Ped. 2.

Aug. Ep. 59.

A. Gell. l. 4. c. 9.

and not of *Nigidius Figulus*: *i. e.* in a good, and not in a bad sense. And so Ἐθελοθρησκεία, is a desire of appearing more *Religious* than ordinary; which is not a thing evil in it self, but depends on circumstances. The next is ἡ ταπεινοφροσύνη, *Humility*, a Vertue so graceful, so becoming Mankind, with a respect to God and to each other, that whatever makes a *Shew* of that, doth so of *Wisdom* too. The third is ἡ ἀφειδία σώματος, *not sparing the Body*, but using it with hardship to keep it under. οὐκ ἐν τιμῇ τινι πρὸς πλησμονὴν τῆς σαρκός. Which Words have such a hardness in their construction, as hath caused great variety of interpretations; which I shall not repeat. That which seems most natural, is, that *Honour* implies *a regard to the Body*; and so it only explains what was meant by ἀφειδία; the sense being, *not with any regard to the Flesh for its satisfaction*: which hath a farther appearance of Wisdom, not barely in the subjection of the Body to the Mind; but as it seems to argue a Mind so elevated above the Body, that it hath little or no regard to the necessities of it.

2. Notwithstanding all this fair *shew of Wisdom*, the *Apostle* doth really condemn these things as *not pleasing to God*, nor *suitable to the Christian Religion*. For,

(1.) He saith they have only *a shew of Wisdom.*

dom. λόγον, φησὶν, ἐδὲ αμν· ἀρετὴν ἐκ ἀλήθειαν, saith St. *Chrysostome*, who certainly understood the force of the Words; the *shew*, saith he, *not the Power, therefore not the Truth of Wisdom. Imaginem rationis, humanæque sapientiæ*, saith St. *Jerom.* σχῆμα ἐκ ἀλήθειαν, saith *Theodoret*; so that notwithstanding the fair *Shew* they make, they have no *real Wisdom* in them.

(2.) This new way of Worship, though it hath such a specious *shew of Devotion* and *Humility*; yet it reflects on the Honour of *Christ*, as *Mediator*; and therefore the Apostle charges the introducers of it, with *not holding the Head.* If the *Cerinthi-* V. 19.
ans did advance *the Angels above Jesus Christ*, they were so much the more guilty; but if these *Judaizers* did only look on them as nearer and more agreeable *Mediators* to us, yet therein they brought a great disparagement upon him, whose Office it was to be the *sole Mediator between God and Men.* Mankind was very excusable in comparison, for finding out other *Mediators*, before God had declared to the World that he had appointed his *Son* to be our only *Advocate* and *Intercessor*; but for those who own his Mediatorship, to make choice of others besides Him, is to call in question the Wisdom of the Father, or the Sufficiency, Interest or Kindness of the Son. For if God hath appointed him for this end, and he be able

able to go through his work, and willing to help all that addreſs themſelves to him; what need to call in other Aſſiſtants? yea, what a Diſhonour is it for him to ſtand by, and Applications be made to them to do that Office, which he was appointed alone to diſcharge?

(3.) Theſe new inventions though never ſo plauſible, are a diſparagement to the Goſpel, as not containing ſufficient, or at leaſt not the moſt ſublime and perfect directions for *Humility* and *Mortification.* For our *Bleſſed Saviour* was ſo far from being remarkable for theſe affected ſingularities, that the freedom and eaſineſs of his converſation, was a great offence to thoſe who underſtood little or nothing of Religion beyond theſe things. *The Son of Man came eating and drinking, and they ſay, Behold a Man Gluttonous, and a Wine-bibber, a friend of Publicans and Sinners.* Not that he gave way to any thing like Luxury, or Intemperance, who was the moſt exact pattern of all true and real Vertues; but becauſe they ſaw nothing extraordinary as to the ſeverity of his Life in theſe Matters, they looked on him but as one of the common ſort of men, making no appearance of more than uſual Sanctity, as to eating and drinking. And when *Johns Diſciples* who were bred up with greater auſterity, were really offended that Chriſts Diſciples did

Matt. 12. 19.

not

not fast as they did: our Saviour puts them off with a Parabolical Answer; *Can the Children of the Bride-chamber fast, as long as the Bridegroom is with them?* which answer might puzzle them more, as not understanding why fasting should be inconsistent with his corporal Presence; yet to let them see that he did not look on *Fasting*, as a *Duty* unsutable to his Religion, he tells them, the Days would come, when his Disciples should have their times of Fasting. *But the Days will come when the Bridegroom shall be taken from them, and then shall they fast.* So that it is not *Occasional* or *Anniversary* Days of *Fasting*, which are condemned here by the Apostle, as *Will-worship, or neglecting the Body*; but the imposing a new and severer course of Life upon Christians, as a way of greater perfection of *Mortification*, than what was required by Christ or his Apostles. This is that which the *Apostle* calls *being subject to Ordinances*; and living after *the Commandments and Doctrines of Men.* *Theodoret* observes *that he doth not mean the Law by this, but the unseasonable Doctrine of these Seducers*; and it is evident from the foregoing part of the 20. v. *Wherefore if ye be dead with Christ from the rudiments of the World*: *i. e.* if ye are freed from the *Yoke of the Law*, what reason is there ye should submit to another, which depends only on the Authority and invention of Men? But what then? *Doth*

Matt. 9. 12, 13.

V. 20.

S. *Paul make it unlawful to submit to any Orders or Rites appointed by the Church in which we live?* By no means. For neither doth the Apostle speak of those who had lawful Authority, but of Seducers; nor doth he speak of things appointed meerly for *Order* and *Decency*; but of such things which are supposed by the Imposers to have more of *true Perfection* and *Sanctity* in them; more *Humility* and *Mortification*; and consequently to be *more pleasing to God*, than bare obedience to the *Precepts* of *Christ* and his *Apostles*. Whoever introduce any such things into the Christian Church, and maintain any such opinions of them, are justly censured by the *Apostle* here, and fall under the condemnation of Seducers.

(4.) These things, whatsoever shew of *Wisdom* and *Humility* they make, are really the effects of *Pride* and *Folly*.

(1.) Of *Pride*: which appears,

1. By a great presumption of their great Skill and Knowledge in the Mysteries of Religion, and
V. 18. of what is most pleasing to God; *Intruding into those things which he hath not seen, vainly puft up by his fleshly mind.* So that here was a great outward appearance of *Humility* and *Mortification*; but within nothing but *Pride* and *Vanity*. It hath been long observed, that those who strive to exceed others in the outward shews and appearances of

Humility

Humility and neglect of the Body, have been most liable to the Temptations of *Spiritual Pride*; *i.e.* to a high opinion of themselves, and a contempt of others; which they have manifested by an invincible stiffness in maintaining their own opinions; a readiness to impose them upon others; and impatience of contradiction from any.

2. By an affectation of greater *Humility*, than appears in others. These Seducers, we *see*, pretended to nothing more than *Humility*. Their *Worship of Angels* was from *Humility*; their *neglect of the Body* from *Humility* too: they made so much shew of it, as gave reason to suspect *Pride* lay at the bottom. For it is more real Humility to be contented to be thought *Proud* unjustly, than to labour for such an opinion of more than ordinary *Humility*, as these Seducers did.

(2.) Of *Folly*; in two things.

1. In placing the main of their Religion in things that would not bear the weight of it, which the Apostle intimates in those Words, *Which all are to perish with the using*: *i.e.* as the *Greek Interpreters* explain it, *the matters of eating and drinking are no such great things, that so much ado should be made about them.* For as our Saviour saith, *Not that which goeth into the Mouth defileth a Man; for it goeth into the Belly, and is cast out into the draught.* And therefore saith the Apostle, *The Kingdom of* Col. 2. V. 22. *Vid. Theod. Theophyl.* Matt. 15. 11. 17. Rom. 14. 17, 18.

God is not Meat and Drink, but Righteousness and Peace, and Joy in the Holy Ghost; for he that in these things serveth Christ, is acceptable to God, and approved of Men.

2. In supposing the following their own *Inventions* to be more pleasing to God, than the observing his own Commands. For this seems to be at the bottom of all; these Seducers made no question, but they had found out ways much more pleasing to God, than those which were in common esteem and practice in the Christian Churches. So that which is called here ἐν Ἐθελοθρησκείᾳ, is by the Latins rendered *in Superstitione*: *i. e.* in an opinion of pleasing God by some particular Rites of their own; in making much of their Religion to lye in forbearing some things and doing others, which God never required, and are made no parts of the Christian Religion by Christ or his Apostles. So that here are two parts of the *Superstition* here spoken of.

1. Forbearing some things as *unlawful*, which God never made *unlawful* by any prohibition, *Touch not, taste not, handle not.* The root of their *Superstition* did not lie, as some imagin, *in supposing the things which they did forbear as in themselves abominable, as some Hereticks did*; but in an opinion, that God would be so much pleased with the meer forbearance of them, that those who design

deſign to pleaſe God, were bound to abſtain from them, although he had never forbidden them. And there is a material difference between theſe three things. (1.) Abſtaining from things as in themſelves unlawful to be uſed. (2.) Preferring the Abſtinence before the Uſe, on ſome particular Seaſons and Occaſions. (3.) Making the forbearance of them as unlawful (though not forbidden) as neceſſary to the pleaſing of God. There were ſuch who did utterly forbid the uſe of *Marriage* and *Meats*, of whom the Apoſtle ſpeaks, 1 *Tim.* 4. 3. And the Chriſtian Church, as S. *Auguſtine* obſerves, doth not fall under this cenſure of the Apoſtle, when in ſome caſes it prefers Abſtinence from both. *Ille prohibet*, ſaith he, *qui hoc malum eſſe dicit, non qui huic bono, aliud melius anteponit.* But yet there may be a *Superſtitious Abſtinence*, without that Superſtitious opinion; or elſe the Chriſtian Church had no reaſon to condemn the *Abſtinence* of the *Montaniſts*, who, as *Tertullian* pleads for them, *utterly rejected that opinion.* Neither was it meerly becauſe *Montanus* wanted *Authority* to make Laws of *Abſtinence.* But *Tertullian* acquaints us with other arguments againſt it, *chiefly from the unſuitableneſs of it to the deſign of Chriſtianity.* And to impoſe ſuch *Abſtinence* as neceſſary to the pleaſing God, is that which the *Church* condemned in *Montanus*;

Aug. c. Fauſt. l. 30. c. 6.

Tert. de Jej. c. 15.

Montanus; and the believing it is a *Superstitious opinion*; though of another sort from that which made the *Use* of them in it self *unlawful*. For they did it upon an extravagant fancy, that *no living Creatures were of Gods making, but were produced by some other powers in opposition to him*; as appears by the *Gnosticks*, the *Marcionists*, the *Manichees*, and the *Encratitæ*. But the same reason could not hold as to those *Judaizing* Christians, who believed the World and all living Creatures were produced by the Power of God. For *Irenæus* saith, *that the Ebionites did hold that God was the Maker of the World*; and therein they differ'd from the *Cerinthians*, as well as in some other opinions; yet these *Ebionites* pretended to be *Christians*, and *universally abstained from Flesh*, as *Epiphanius* saith: not that they had any reason to account Flesh abominable; but they had learnt from the *Essens* to abstain from it, and thought it greater *Sanctity* so to do.

Iren. l. 1. *c.* 26.

Epiph. hær. 30. *p.* 139.

2. Their *Superstition* did lie in supposing that God would be mightily pleased with their doing some things of their own invention, as the *Worship* of *Angels* was; which was so far from being commanded by God in the *Law of Moses*, that they had thence many arguments against it: but notwithstanding they thought there was so much of *Humility* and *Complement* to *God Almighty* in it, that he could not but be very much pleased with

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it. And when men lay a great weight of Religion upon *doing* or *forbearing things*, neither commanded nor forbidden by the Law of God, that is so far from being a pleasing Worship of God, that it deserves no other name but that of *Superstition* and *Will-worship*; as they do imply *a shew of Wisdom*, without the *Truth and Power of it*.

But here arises the main difficulty; "How shall "we put a difference between what is pleasing to "God, and what is not; or between true *Religion* "and *Superstition*? For since the Apostle implies "that some things may have *a shew of Wisdom* in "them, *i. e.* may seem pleasing to God, which are "not so; and other things may be more pleasing "to God, which do not make such *a shew of Wis-* "*dom* to Men; it seems to be a matter of as great "difficulty as concernment to us, to understand "the just and true bounds between *Religious and* "*Superstitious Worship*.

This is an enquiry of so great moment and consequence, for the easing our minds of many troublesome doubts and fears, and setling in them a true notion of *Religion*; that I shall from hence apply my self to the consideration of the true difference between the *reasonable Worship of God, and Superstition*.

Superstition in the general, is nothing else but *an unpleasing Worship of God*. I do not speak of that *Worship* which relates to a *false object*; which

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is more properly *Idolatry*; but when that Worship is ultimately referred to a *true Object*, as in the *Worship of Angels as Mediators*, then it is *Superstition* too; it being an undue way of giving *Worship* to the *true God*. I shall not trouble my self with an enquiry into the *Etymology* of the words in *Greek* or *Latin*, it being well observed by *Aquinas*, *that in this matter we are not so much to observe the Etymology of Superstition, as the use of the Word*. And that hath been different according to mens notions concerning Religion.

Aq. 2. 2. q. 92.

Those who believed no *God* at all, or at least no Providence, accounted all *Religion* to be nothing but *Superstition*. And it is a weak and silly Apology a late *Commentator* on *Lucretius* makes for his saying, *so much mischief hath been done by Religion; by Religion*, saith he, *he meant Superstition*; for he accounted all *Religion* to be nothing else but *Superstition*. And those in our Age, who can find no other difference between them; *but that one is allowed, and the other not; or one is what we like, and the other what we dislike*; do destroy any real difference between them; and make only *Religion* a *Superstition in fashion*; and *Superstition* a *Religion out of fashion*. Whereas if there be a *God* and *Providence*, there must be such a thing as *true Religion*: *i. e.* there ought to be some Acts in us agreeable to the Conceptions we have of the Divine

Tan. Fabr. Not. p. 294.

Leviath. ch. 6. ch. 11.

vine Nature. For, His *Majesty* and *Power* requires our *Fear*; not an amazing, confounding, unaccountable Fear, arising from a perplexity and disorder of our imaginations; but a just, reasonable, prudent Fear, springing from our most serious thoughts and deepest consideration of things. For, if it be impossible for any thinking man to satisfie himself in the train of Causes, but *he must come to this thought at last, that there is some Cause, whereof there is no former Cause, but is Eternal; which is that we call God*; then it is impossible if this man pursues his own thoughts, but the first Consequence from hence will be, that if this *God* be the *first cause of all things*, *his Power and Majesty* is so great, as to command a due Reverence and Fear from us his Creatures. This is not such a *Fear* as *Men have in a storm, or when a sudden calamity seizeth upon them, which makes them at their wits end, and to run they know not whither for present help*; but it is a settled, calm, composed temper of mind; a Fear without consternation; an Awe and Reverence of the Divine Majesty, without terrour and astonishment. For, as the mighty Power of God begets fear in us, so the infinite Goodness and Wisdom of God, not only keep up mens minds from sinking into slavish Fear, and horrible despair; but fills them with comfortable hopes, and a patient and humble Trust

and Confidence in his never-failing Providence. And this is the *Nature* of *true Religion* in the Minds of Men.

But because it tends to the honour of our Maker, and the incouraging one another to Acts of Piety and Devotion, that this inward sense of our Minds be expressed by such external Actions as are agreeable thereto, from thence came the necessity of the publick Offices of Religion, wherein we offer up our Prayers and Praises to the Divine Majesty in acknowledgment of our Dependence upon him for what we have, or are, or hope for. And there is nothing in all this, but what is highly just and reasonable, and this is *true natural Religion.*

But then we cannot deny, that there is too great a natural proneness in Mankind to *Superstition.* For, when men cannot shake off the apprehension of a Deity, and yet are conscious to themselves that they have offended him; the very thoughts of him prove so uneasie to them, that they would be glad to believe there were none at all, and give all the advantage to Atheistical Objections which a willing mind can do: And as *Plutarch* observes of Superstitious Men, *they would be Atheists if they durst.* But finding still an inward dissatisfaction, and an impossibility of rooting out the fears of a Deity; the

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next thing is, to think upon some ways to please him, and to mitigate his displeasure against them. And we can hardly imagine any thing so pompous and ceremonious, so mean and servile, so cruel and barbarous, so ridiculous and foppish, but Mankind have made use of it to atone the anger of their Gods. For, the first effect of *Superstition*, on Mens minds, was; that they durst not make immediate *Applications* to the *Supreme Being*, as being too great and powerful for them: therefore they pitched on some inferiour Beings to mediate, and to offer up their Devotions and Sacrifices to him, whom they thought it too great presumption to approach. When thus *Superstition* in the most proper sense of δεισιδαιμονία had in a great measure supplanted *true Religion* in the World; then it proceeded to find out such ways and methods of Worship, as they thought would be most pleasing to these inferiour Deities. They erected Temples and Altars to them, and set out their Images with all the Art and Splendor they were capable of; and upon extraordinary Occasions they were carried with wonderful Pomp and Solemnity through the Streets, all Orders of Men attending them with Supplications and Prayers and costly Sacrifices to avert their Wrath and Displeasure. And they were not content with promiscuous Sacrifices, but they studied by all possible means to

find out what *Sacrifices* would pleaſe them beſt; if they fancied it muſt be ſomething very dear and precious to them, they ſtuck not at offering up their very children to appeaſe them; and contrived by loud Muſick to ſtop their ears from hearing the hideous cries of their Children while they were roaſting in the flames. And in their ordinary Sacrifices, they were extremely ſcrupulous, leſt any ſpot or blemiſh, or number, or unfit ſeaſon, or ſo much as colour ſhould be diſpleaſing to the Gods they offered them to: ſome muſt have white and uneven; others black and even ſacrifices; ſome muſt have their Sacrifices offerd at the riſing, ſome at the ſetting of the Sun; ſome muſt have one ſort of Beaſts, and ſome another; and ſome no leſs than Mans fleſh would ſatisfy; which inhumane Sacrifices, on ſome occaſions, did almoſt univerſally obtain, before the Chriſtian Religion prevailed in the World. But again, other Deities were preſumed to be ſo nice and ſqueamiſh, that nothing was to be offered them but Milk, and Wine, and Honey, and ſome Fruits of the Earth. It were infinite to relate the Rites and Cuſtoms of their Sacrifices, and all the ways they uſed to pleaſe their Gods, and to find out whether they were pleaſed or not; by the poſture, the tongue, the entrails of their Beaſts; by the flying of Birds, the feeding of Chickens, the fall-

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ing of a staff, the holes of a sieve, &c. and innumerable ways of Divination, by which they flatter'd themselves that they understood the good Will and Pleasure of their Gods, which did not so much satisfy their curiosity, as fill them with perpetual fears, and oppress them with the horrible Bondage of *Superstition*; which exalted almost every thing to the honour of a Deity, and made themselves miserable by seeking to please them.

But although this were the deplorable state of Mankind, forsaken of God and left to their own inventions; yet such is the weakness and folly of Men, that when God himself had given a *Law* to the *Israelites* to regulate their Worship, with as much condescension to their weakness, as the Wisdom of his Laws would permit; yet so great was the Witchcraft of *Superstition*, that they were always almost hankering after the *Dotage* of their neighbour Nations. And although they often smarted severely for it; yet the rod was no sooner off, but they were ready to return to their former *Superstitious vanities*, and were so obstinately bent upon them, that nothing could move them; not their former experience; not the unreasonableness of the thing; not the terrible denunciations of Gods heavy judgments against them; till at last, when there was no remedy,

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the whole People were carried into Captivity; from whence the greatest part never returned, and their very memory is lost by a mixture with other Nations. Those who returned, have been so wise ever since, as to abhor that provoking sin of *Idolatry*; which their Ancestors suffered so much for: but by degrees they fell into other kinds of *Superstitions*. For it was thought a mean thing among them to keep to the Law; but the *Traditions* of their *Elders* were looked upon as precious things; and happy was the Man that was strictest in the observance of them. Their frequent Washings, their additional Fastings and Prayers, their Garments, their Postures, their very Looks had such an appearance of Sanctity above other Mens; that a man who kept only to the Law, was of no regard or esteem for Piety and Devotion.

This was the *state* of *Religion* among the Jews when Christ appeared, who laid open the foppery and hypocrisie of these great pretenders to extraordinary Sanctity. He directed men *to the love of God and their Neighbours*, as the main substantial parts of *true Religion*. And next to his making a propitiation for the sins of Mankind by the Sacrifice of himself, his great end was to restore *true Religion* to the World, which had been so long buried under the heap of *Superstitions*.

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And there needed so great an Authority as his was, to assure Mankind, that nothing was so pleasing and acceptable to God, as unaffected Piety, and universal Goodness; which comprehends under it all the Duties of Temperance, Righteousness and Charity. And it is one great Argument of the Providence of God watching over his Church, that he hath caused the Discourses of our *Blessed Saviour* to be preserved by the *Writings* of the *Evangelists*; without which in all likelihood, the Christian Religion had been long since lost in the World. For the *Jewish Christians* who corrupted Christianity, had represented St. *Peter* as so favourable to them; and so misrepresented St. *Paul*; that unless Christs Doctrine had been preserved in his own words, and that by the concurrent Testimony of different Writers, the Christian Religion had preserved little more than its name in the World.

And yet with all this advantage, such was still the fondness of Mankind for their own *Inventions*, that even under the Apostles eyes, most of the Churches began to be tainted with these corruptions; partly by the *Judaizing Christians*; and partly by the followers of *Simon* and *Menander*. But they all agreed in something new and mysterious, and more pleasing to God, than the dull and common way of *Faith* and *Obedience*. After the

the *Apostles* decease, the corruptions still multiplied, and any new pretence to *Revelations* and *Mysteries*, especially being joined with greater *Abstinence and severity of Life*, took wonderfully among weak and injudicious Christians, and made them apt to despise the *Churches Devotions*, as too cold and flat, and not having that *Life and Spirit*, that Strictness and Austerity which appeared among the new pretenders. What disturbance on this account did the Spirit of *Montanus* give to the Churches of *Phrygia*, *Galatia*, and *Cappadocia*? The meer pretence to *Revelation* had never done it, had it not been for the stricter Laws of *Fasting* and *Mortification*, and greater Severity of Discipline than was used in the Catholick Church. It was this which made *Tertullian* swallow the bait he had despised before; and the force of all his Arguments against the Church is, we are stricter than you. But notwithstanding all these pretences, the Christian Church still kept it self within its bounds, making nothing necessary to Salvation, but what Christ and his Apostles had made so; yet recommending the *Practice* of *Fasting*, as there were just *Occasions*, especially before the great solemnity of *Easter*; wherein both the *Sacraments* were administred with more than ordinary *Devotion*, and the *Penitents* reconciled to the *Communion* of the *Church*.

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If we look at this day into the *state* of the *Christian World*; how great a part of it is relapsed into almost *Heathen Superstitions*, in the *Worship* of *Images*, and *Saints*, and *Angels* as *Mediators*? and no great difference in the outward Solemnities and Processions, save that their *Sacrifices* are turned into a *Consecrated Wafer*, which is carried in *Procession*, as the *Heathen Gods* were wont to be. It is true, there are great pretences to *Will-worship*, and *Humility*, and *neglecting the Body* in several *Orders* of Men; and those are looked on as ways of *greater perfection*, than living in the World, and doing good in it. Which we have no reason to think agreeable to the Doctrine of Christ or our Apostle here. But where there is not only *Sanctity* and *Merit*, placed in such observations, but *Supererogation too*, they flatly contradict St *Paul*; for if that be true, these things have far more than *the shew of Wisdom*; for what wiser thing can any man do, than not only to provide for his own Salvation, but for others too?

In the *Eastern Churches*, the best part, I fear, of their remaining Christianity, lies in the strict observing the *Fasts* and *Feasts* of the *Church*. They mightily despise the *Fasting* practised in the *Roman Church*, as not deserving the name of *Fasting*, because they end it at noon, and allow Wine and Fish for their repasts. Although it is said

Mich. Nau. Eccl. Græc. Effig. p. 260. *Bas. hom. de jejun.* *Chrisost. hom. 6. ad Pop. Antioch.*

that of late the Greeks break the strict Fast at noon; but in St. *Chrys.* and St. *Basils* time they accounted it no Fast wherein they did not totally abstain till night. The more *Eastern Christians* allow neither *Fish*, nor *Wine*, nor *Oyl in their Lents*, and they keep more in the Year than the *Latin Church* *.

In the *Church of England*, which approacheth neareſt of any in the World to the *Primitive Church*, the Duty of *Fasting* is recommended upon its true Grounds, not as though there were any peculiar *Sanctity* or *Merit* in it, which are *Superstitious* Conceits, but to keep the Body in Subjection to the Spirit. It lays no snares upon the *Consciences* of Men; it gives no Countenance to hypocritical pretences to *Fasting*; but it sets before us the example and practice of the *Primitive Church*, and according to the temper and Moderation then used, leaves persons to judge of their own strength, occasions, times, manner and degrees of *Fasting*; excepting the *Fast on good Friday* or the true *Antepaschal Fast* (which some kept longer than others) which *Tertullian*

* *V. Job. Ludolph. Hist. Æthiopic. l. 3. c. 6. n. 81. Thom. à Jesu de Convers. omnium Gent. l. 7. c. 18. Cotovic. Itiner. Hierosolymit. & Syriac. p. 207. Franc. Quaresm. Elucid. Terræ Sanctæ l. 1. c. 53, 54, 55, 56, 57, 58. Eustrat. Zialouski de Eccles. Orient. Græc. p. 39. Metroph. Critopul. c. 18. Haud scio, inquit Methodius Græcus (apud Mich. Nau. in Eccles. Græcæ effigie Dial. 13) unde factum sit ut vos Latini à reliquis Christianorum Nationibus, sic in jejunando recesseritis, ut nulla vobis nè Maronitana quidem, quæ tota vestra est, consentiat. Jejunatis sabbato, feriâ 4. Non abstinetis ab esu Carnium; pisces, & quibusdam in locis, lacticinia, quadragesimali tempore comeditis, solvitis meridie jejunium*, &c.

tullian saith, *was universally observed by the Christian Church, as a necessary Fast, and had been so from the Apostles times*; but as to other times a greater liberty was allowed, *De Jei. c.2.*

Laxus ac liber modus abstinendi
Ponitur cunctis; neque nos severus
Terror impellit; sua quemque cogit
velle Potestas.

Prudent. 1. Cath. hymn. post jejun. V. Tert. de jejun. c. 2. 13. Hier. ep. 54. ad Marcel. Aug. c. Faust. Manich. l. 30. c. 5. ad Casul. Ep. 86. Epiph. in Expos. fidei Cath. n. 23. Socr l. 5. c. 22. Victor. Antioch. in Marc. 2. Cassian. Coll. 21. c. 30.

Yet even *this Church*, that is so wise, so moderate, cannot escape the charge of *Will-worship and Superstition*, for the *Orders* that are observed in it. But wherein is it that we are liable to this charge? Do we make the *Orders* of the *Church* any *parts* of our *Religion*? Or think that God is any otherwise displeased with others violation of them, than as it argues a froward, restless, unpeaceable Spirit? But what is it then? *God*, say they, *hath not commanded these things, therefore they are Will-worship and Superstition.*

This is an *Objection*, which for the honour of our Church I must remove, before I proceed to what remains. The true Case among us is this, The Church appoints such *Orders* to be observed in it, which have no express *command in Scripture*; some utterly refuse them as *unlawful*, though no where forbidden in Scripture; the Question is,

Whether of theſe two ſorts, thoſe who practiſe according to theſe Orders, or thoſe who utterly refuſe, are liable to the charge of *Will-worſhip* and *Superſtition?*

To clear this, we muſt ſtate the notion of *Will-worſhip* and *Superſtition* as they are here uſed by the Apoſtle, and then apply it to the preſent Caſe.

(1.) *Will-worſhip* I have ſhew'd, is nothing but a forwardneſs to do ſomething that relates to the pleaſing of God; and is ſaid by the Apoſtle to have *a ſhew of Wiſdom*, and therefore can be no more evil in it ſelf, than *Humility, or neglecting the Body*; but whether it be good or evil is to be determin'd by circumſtances.

(2.) Thoſe circumſtances which make it ill are, when men make thoſe things a *part* of their Religion, which God hath neither commanded nor forbidden; and think God is pleaſed with their meer doing or abſtaining from doing them, and this is true *Superſtition*. For there are two things neceſſary to the *Notion* of it.

1. That the matter about which it is converſant relate to the *pleaſing of God*. *Superſtition* I grant, hath been taken by *Plutarch* and others from him, for *a dreadful apprehenſion of the Deity*; but that is rather the *foundation* of *Superſtition*, than the definition of it. For a Superſtitious Man doth

doth both think God to be angry without juſt cauſe, and beyond reaſon; and to be pleaſed again without reaſon. If he thought God inexorable upon his Diſpleaſure, he muſt preſently deſpair; but becauſe he thinks he may be eaſily pleaſed again, therefore he bethinks himſelf in what way he may beſt do it; and ſo deviſes ſeveral ways of his own, and uſeth any means ſuggeſted by others, though never ſo unreaſonable in themſelves, in hopes to pleaſe God by them. Thence *Plutarch* mentions ſuch Mens, ἀλλοκότους προσκυνήσεις, *uncouth ways of Worſhip*; and he obſerves, that at the ſame time, κολακεύσιν καὶ λοιδωρῶσιν, *they flatter and reproach God*; they think unworthily of him, as of one that is μικρόλυπος *very eaſily provoked*; and yet that he is εὐμεταβολος, *as eaſily changed*; and that is the reaſon why a Superſtitious fear puts men upon finding out any ways and methods to pleaſe him, though never ſo unreaſonable; for they looking upon God as a peeviſh, angry, humourſome Being, they have no certain Rule to judge what will pleaſe him, and therefore follow their own fancy and imagination about it.

2. That they be miſtaken in their judgment concerning what they believe to be pleaſing to God, that is, that they judge that to be ſo, which really is not. So *Superſtition* is an exceſs or over-

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doing in the matter of Worship; that which doth *modum legitimum cultus superstare & excedere*, saith *Vossius*; which *Etymology* he thinks much better than any other. *Cicero* saith, that Religion is *pius cultus*, Superstition *timor inanis Deorum*; *i. e.* one is a reasonable, the other an unreasonable Worship. So *A. Gellius* saith, it is *inepta & importuna Religio*; a foolish and troublesome Religion. *Festus* applies it to those things which are done, *præter morem Civitatis*; against the Custom prescribed by Law. As those of the *Church of Rome* do, to things done against the *commands* of the *Church*: and so not fasting upon *Saturdays*, and fasting upon *Sundays* are both *Superstitious* in their account; but all the Trumpery of the Mass, and Follies of their Worship are by no means *Superstitious*, because required by the Church. Which however helps us with a good argument to prove that the Worship of *Images*, and *Saints*, and *Angels* are required by their *Church*; or else by their own confession they must be *Superstitious*. But their Divines do all agree with *Aquinas*, *that men may be guilty of Superstition in the Worship of the true God*; i. e. *when men make choice of something unfit or unreasonable to express their Worship of God.* And *Suarez* quotes *Cajetan*, as allowing this Text to be extended to all *Superstitious Worship not founded in right reason.* And *Cajetan* upon the place saith, that

Voss. Etym.
Cic. l. 1. de N. D.
Fest v. Religios.
Aq. 2. 2. q. 92. Art. 2. q. 98. Art. 3.
Suarez de Rel. tr. 3. l. 2. c. 1.

that although they have *a shew of Wisdom*; yet *not in any honour*, saith he, *i. e. they deserve no esteem, being only for the satisfying of the flesh*: i. e. *of a carnal desire as to these external observations.*

(3.) The *Superstition* here condemned, lay in the supposing God to be pleased with the forbearance of lawful things; *touch not*, *taste not*, *handle not*. Which if we understand either of *Meats* or *Marriage*, was a forbearance of things in themselves lawful; but they supposed God would be far better pleased with their forbearance of them. I do not say, it is *Superstition* for any man to abstain from doing what he apprehends to be unlawful by vertue of a general command: For that is a Moral Duty, and obedience to those places of Scripture which bid us abstain from all kind and appearance of evil. But yet it is plain here was a *Negative Superstition* in the forbearance of lawful things: And so it was in the dispute between Christ and the Pharisees *about healing on the Sabbath Day*; they thought it unlawful: Christ declares it to be lawful to do good on the Sabbath Days. Here was no positive observance on the *Pharisees* part; Yet here was *Superstition* in them; and therefore the true notion of *Superstition* doth extend to the forbearance of things in themselves lawful as displeasing to God. *Matt.* 12. 10. 12.

But how shall we know, when such a forbearance is *Superstitious*? By

By these Rules:

1. If such a forbearance be thought to bring some *special honour* to God. For then, even Dr. *Ames* himself grants it to be *Superstition*, *to abstain from lawful things though accounted unlawful by the Persons who abstain*; *when some singular service and honour is by that abstinence intended*: For then he grants it to be *a kind of Ceremonious Worship*. The question then is, when this case happens; for our Abstinence from *Popish* or *Mahumetan Superstitions*, is not any special Act of *Service*, or *Honour* to God. But if we lived where those *Acts* of *Worship* were required by lawful Authority; and we refused to comply with them, that would be a special Act of Honour and Worship to God; it being a declaration of our Minds, that we thought God dishonoured by such Acts, and therefore durst not comply with them. It was once a great Question among the Papists, whether they might lawfully come to our Churches, or not; and if not to our Prayers and Sacraments, yet to our Sermons, to avoid the severe Penalties of the Laws. And after great debate both by a *Committee* of the *Council* of *Trent*, and afterwards at *Rome*; it was resolved in the *Negative*, upon this Reason, because in our Circumstances, it was *signum distinctivum cultûs*, a mark of distinction as to *Religious Worship*, and therefore it was an *Act* of special

Fresh Suit, p. 101.

cial honour and service to God to forbear. To abstain from pouring out Wine, and throwing Incense in the fire, is in it self no Act of Worship; but when the Heathen Emperours commanded the Christians to do it, in token of compliance with their Religion; their abstaining then from it, was a singular Act of Worship to God. So in the present Case, when men are required by lawful Authority, to do things which in themselves are lawful, to testifie their union and conjunction with us in Religion; their refusal in this Case is a special *Act* of *Worship*; and being without Ground, is nothing else but *Superstition*.

2. When men value and esteem themselves as more holy and more in the favour of God on the account of such forbearance. As the *Pharisees* did on the account of their *Traditions*, who believed that God had no such people upon Earth as they were; and despised others who were far nearer to the Kingdom of God than themselves, as mere *Publicans* and *Sinners*. And it is very natural to Mankind to set a great value upon themselves, for the sake of their affected singularities in Religion; and in a transport of pride and vanity, to tell God himself, as the Pharisee did, *That they are not like other Men*: But this is a certain sign, whatsoever they pretend, that they look on the forbearance of the things which o-

thers do, as a part of *Holineſs*; and if they do ſo, it is undoubtedly *Superſtition*. For, on this ground we charge the *Papiſts* with *Superſtition* in their *Ceremonies*, becauſe they place holineſs in them. It is true, they ſay they are the Inſtruments to convey ſome degrees of holineſs to them; but this makes no material difference; for thoſe who account themſelves more in God's eſteem for the ſake of ſuch things, do attribute ſome real efficacy to ſuch diſtinctive Characters of themſelves, as to the obtaining the favour of God.

3. When they forbear neceſſary Duties of Religion rather than comply with others in lawful things, as Communion with the Church they live in, in Prayers and Sacraments: which cannot be denied to be neceſſary Duties; but if men reſolve rather to forbear theſe, than to join in ſuch Ceremonies and Prayers as do accompany the performance of them, it is a ſign they prefer the following their own imaginations before the joining in Communion with the Church in the moſt unqueſtionable Duties of Religion: As in the Caſe of the *Encratitæ* of old, who thought it unlawful to taſte of Wine; and therefore refuſed to communicate in the Euchariſt, unleſs they might have it in Water alone. Was not this a great *Superſtition* in them, rather to forbear communicating with the Church, than not to obſerve their own fancies

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in what they thought most pleasing to God, as to the manner of doing it?

Now to apply this to our own Case.

We are often blamed for laying too great weight on the *Ceremonies* of this *Church*. But certainly, never any *Church* laid less weight upon its own Orders, supposing that it believes them to be just and reasonable. It places no *holiness*, no *merit*, no *efficacy* in them, as to the obtaining the Grace and Favour of God: It expects obedience only for *Order* and *Peace-sake*; It hath taken great care by *Prefaces* and *Canons* and *Rubricks*, to prevent any misinterpretation of its intention and design.

But on the other side, those who dissent from us, lay so great weight on their scruples, that they will rather hazard breaking a Church in pieces, ruining our Religion by our differences, losing all the benefit of Communion with a Church, whose Doctrine they approve in all the Duties of religious Worship; than they will yield to the allowance of those circumstances of our Communion which our Church requires. And now on which side the charge of *Superstition* more justly lyes, let all that are impartial judge.

So much I thought necessary on this *Occasion* to speak, in vindication of our *Church* from this common imputation of *Superstition*, by those who so little understand what it means.

Nothing now remains, but to make *Application* of all to our selves. You see how much mischief *the shew of Wisdom* was like to do in the *Apostolical Churches*; let us all have a care of being deceived by it. It was long since observed by *Menander*,

Τὸ πιθανὸν ἰσχὺν τ' ἀληθείας ἔχει
Ἐνίοτε μείζω, κ' πιθανωτέραν ὄχλῳ. Men.

That things which were like Truth were more easily believed by the generality of Mankind, than Truth it self. So I am afraid it is about Religion, which is the *Wisdom* here spoken of, that which makes a great *shew* of it to the World, is more apt to prevail among persons of weak and well disposed Minds than true Wisdom. For *the shew of Wisdom* strikes more upon the fancy and inclination of such Persons, than sober, calm and well-weighed Religion; which seems dull and flat to those who have more warmth and zeal than judgment and discretion. And I do not at all question, but many of the corruptions of the Christian Church came in, from an apprehended necessity of complying with the heat of some over-zealous people; who were not contented with the plain and excellent Religion of Jesus Christ; but they must, as they thought, heighten and improve it, till they had mixed with it the freaks of *Enthusiasm*, or the dotages of *Superstition*.

In the *Church* of *Rome* there is in many things a *shew of Wisdom*, in *Will-worship and Humility, and neglecting*

glecting the Body; And in ſome of our Sects, that ſeem to abhor *Will-worſhip* ſo much, that for fear of it they will not give civil reſpect to men; yet they pretend to *ſhew of Wiſdom in Humility and neglecting the Body*, but after a different manner: others have a *ſhew of Wiſdom* too in a wonderful, I had almoſt ſaid, *ſuperſtitious* zeal, againſt what they call *Will-worſhip* and *Superſtition*. But what is to be done in this Caſe? How ſhall we avoid being led aſide by ſuch a *ſhew of Wiſdom*, on every ſide? I ſhall only lay down ſome Directions, and ſo conclude.

(1.) Fix a true Notion of God and the Chriſtian Religion in your minds. If you judge aright of the Divine Nature, it will eaſe your minds of many uneaſie thoughts, troubleſome fears and ſuperſtitious fancies. He is not capable of being flattered or deceived by us; God is neither taken with outward appearances, nor is he pleaſed with any thing we do, merely becauſe it is diſpleaſing to our ſelves, *The righteous God loveth righteouſneſs*; and he is pleaſed beſt with the innocency, integrity and holineſs of our hearts and lives. And for the Chriſtian Religion, take not your Notion of it from the different and uncertain opinions of Men, but from the Doctrines of Chriſt and his Apoſtles. Men do not read the Scriptures as they ought to do, with a deſign to know their Religi-

on

on by them; but to justifie what they take to be Religion from them. One would think it were impossible for any one that considered the sayings of Christ or his Apostles, to place his Religion in being for or against any particular Modes or Ceremonies of Worship; whereby he may so easily see that it lies chiefly in an excellent temper of mind, holy, spiritual, humble, calm, peaceable, charitable, and a suitableness of action to this temper. This is so plain and easie to be understood, that he must read the New Testament with a very ill mind, that doth not find it out. And if you have settled this Notion of true Religion, it will be a continual Touchstone about you to judge of all Pretenders.

(2.) Set not an equal value on things that are good in order to other things, that you do upon things that are good in themselves. For the one are but the Instruments of Religion, the other are properly the Duties of it. *He hath shewed thee, O man, what is good,* viz. *to do justly, and to love mercy, and to walk humbly with thy God.* And this was spoken when very costly Sacrifices were offered instead of it; no less than thousands, and ten thousands; yea the first-born, and the fruit of their Bodies. And therefore God sets a high value on these Duties, and so ought we. No one that hath any sense of Religion can despise the imme-

Mic. 6. 8.

diate

diate Duties of Divine Worship; it being a good Saying of *Pythagoras*, mention'd by *Cicero* and *Plutarch*, that we are never better than when we approach to God; or, as *Cicero* expresses it, when we do *rebus Divinis operam dare*, are employed in the Duties of Divine Worship: But yet to do good is better than Sacrifice, and to forgive an injury than the fat of Rams. It is a wise Observation of *Maimonides*, That the intention of the Law of God is to keep men within the just Bounds of Vertue; but when men found a stronger inclination to one extreme than to another, they made use of remedies proper to reduce themselves from that extreme, by great severities towards themselves, by Watchings, and extraordinary Fastings, and other hardships: But when Fools saw Wise men do these things, they imagined presently that there was an Excellency in the things themselves, and that if they did the same things, they should pass for very good men, and be highly in the favour of God. Which, saith he, is just like an ignorant Fellow, who observing the Physicians prescribing Physick to his Patients, and forbidding eating to them, and finding them to recover upon it, should presently conclude, that surely it is the best way to live upon Scammony and Aloes, and such like, and to keep himself with the same strictness that was prescribed to the Sick; which instead

Plutarch de Superst. Cic. de Legib. l. 2. c. 9.

Porta Mosis p. 201.

instead of preventing a Disease, would certainly bring one: so, saith he, do those who use the remedies of diseased minds in a state of health, they spoil a good constitution of their souls, and make it uneasie and troublesome.

(3.) Judge of mens pretences, not by their outward *shew* and *appearance*, but by the *Spirit* and *Temper* that goes along with them. This was the course the Apostle here took; he regarded not their *shew* of *Wisdom* and great *appearance* of *Humility* and *Mortification*; but he pursued these things to their Fountain-Head, and there he found nothing but *spiritual pride, and vanity of mind.* We must not judge easily nor rashly concerning this; but where the evidence is notorious, we have great reason to sleight and contemn the most sanctimonious appearance, *i. e.* if there be great uncharitableness and censoriousness towards all who do not comply with them; great scorn and contempt of all other ways but their own; great malice and spight against all who go about to oppose them; where these are, whether in the *Church* of *Rome*, or elsewhere, whatever *the shew of wisdom be*, this *wisdom descendeth not from above, but is earthly, sensual, devilish. But the Wisdom that is from above, is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, and easie to be entreated, full of mercy and good fruits, without partiality, and without hypocrisie.*

Ver. 18.

Jam. 3. 15. Ver. 17.

FINIS.